

...Reflections, continued from page 1

Q: What is the biggest challenge for the workers and volunteers at the border?

PW: There are many challenges for the staff and volunteers. Hundreds of volunteers have been responding since the surge began in 2014. The work is physically and emotionally demanding. We were receiving an average of 350 refugees per day, which is even higher currently. When the kitchen runs out of food, a request is sent to area churches, agencies, and restaurants, who respond quickly. When we run out of new undergarments, volunteers run to the store and make purchases with funding from churches, civic agencies, and people of good will.

Q: Please share a moment when you felt your presence, and that of the other Sisters, made a difference.

PW: The shelters function with the assistance of volunteers. They come from all over the country: individuals and members of faith groups, civic agencies, and Peace Corps alumnae. I recall a child of perhaps three years who was alone and wailing hysterically. I led him by the hand through four dormitories before finding his mother, who was in the shower. The migrant children have suffered extreme trauma and will need therapy, education, and guidance to be healed.

Q: What aspect of your humanitarian work affected you the most?

PW: My first impression on my first day at the shelter is that the migrants are people, too. They are human beings who are desperately seeking humanitarian aid and treatment. They take the risk for safety, employment, and self-improvement.

Q: What is the most important news you wish to share?

PW: The refugees are not criminals. They are human beings who seek freedom, safety, and employment. The USA has the resources to aid the asylum seekers, and to respond creatively with humanitarian aid and governmental programs to improve education, agriculture, and law enforcement to our Latin American neighbors. Pope Francis reminds us of Jesus' message to welcome the stranger.

To read more about Sr. Patricia's visit to the border, go to her blog at <https://www.csasisters.org/news-events/elpaso.cfm> ■



Newly Released Resource for Prison Ministers:

Understanding Trauma

The newest publication written and developed by Dismas Ministry is *Understanding Trauma: A Training Resource for Catholics in Prison Ministry*. This new resource provides an examination of trauma, with the understanding that many people behind bars were perpetrators of trauma, but victims of trauma as well. As the saying goes, "Hurt people hurt people." This publication is not an exhaustive study or explanation of trauma, but serves as a guide to help prison volunteers recognize the signs of trauma during their visits. It provides resources that may be helpful to both the prison visitor and the prisoner. This cost for this resource is \$12.50.

Understanding Trauma is a companion piece to *Messengers of Hope: A Catholic Prison Ministry Training Resource*, which is a single volume that covers a wide range of subjects pertinent to those who are interested in prison ministry or are already engaged in it. *Messengers of Hope* comes with a companion DVD of Catholics speaking personally of their experiences with the incarcerated. This resource is \$15.

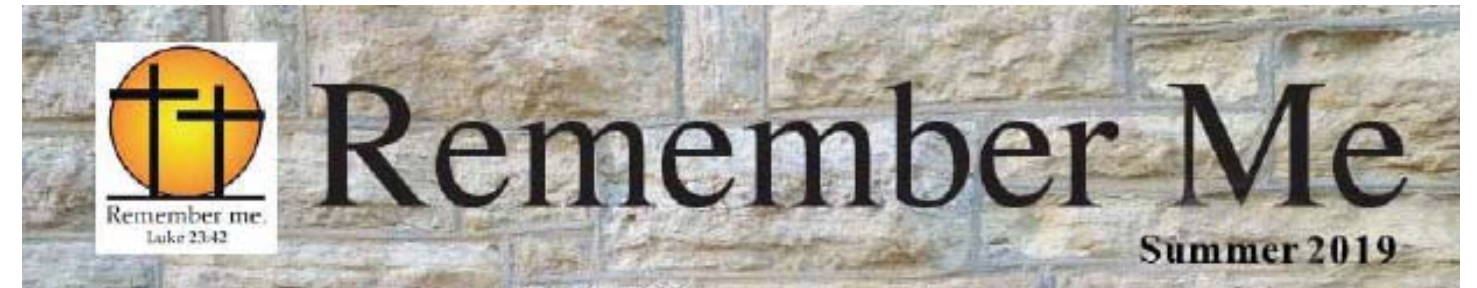
FOR A LIMITED TIME, WE ARE OFFERING A SPECIAL PROMOTIONAL DEAL. You can order both *Messengers of Hope* and *Understanding Trauma* for the low price of only \$20 for both books. Offer ends June 30, 2019.

Go to www.dismasministry.org/shop to order yours today.



*A newsletter published by Dismas Ministry
A national Catholic outreach for inmates, victims, their families,
the released from prison, and for the community.*

DISMAS MINISTRY is registered as a nonprofit corporation in the State of Wisconsin, and listed in the US Catholic Directory as a religious, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization. All gifts are tax deductible.



"A national Catholic ministry supporting the spiritual lives and rehabilitation of prisoners."

REFLECTIONS FROM THE BORDER:

A Conversation with Sr. Patricia Weidman, CSA

We are blessed to have Sr. Patricia Weidman, CSA – a board certified chaplain (retired) from Frackville, Pennsylvania – serving on the Dismas Ministry Board of Directors. She currently serves as the Board President.

Her early background includes service as a hospital, hospice, and addiction treatment chaplain. She began as a correctional chaplain for one year at a county prison, and transitioned into ministry as a federal correctional chaplain for twenty years. Her work in male institutions included both a maximum high security penitentiary and medium security prison in Pennsylvania, and a medium security facility in West Virginia.



Sr. Patricia is a member of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, and the National Association of Catholic Chaplains.

Dismas Ministry Executive Director Tyler Curtis met recently with Sr. Patricia to talk about her call to ministry at our southern border. Their Q&A session follows:

Q: Please share the story of how you came to minister at the US/Mexico border.

PW: The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) requested in December that Sisters volunteer to assist at the refugee/asylum seeker shelters in south Texas. The respite centers were overwhelmed with the refugee surge. I am retired and I speak adequate Spanish. The leadership of the Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes was happy for me to volunteer for two weeks in January at Catholic Charities Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen, Texas. A second request from LCWR came in February for Sisters to volunteer at Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas. My community leadership gave their blessing again for me to volunteer for two weeks in March-April.



Q: What is the biggest challenge for the refugees?

PW: The refugees/asylum seekers have many challenges. They are primarily young families from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and secondarily from Cuba, Mexico, and Brazil. They are fleeing extreme violence, sex trafficking, and poverty. They left their villages and loved ones in pursuit of employment and safety.

They arrive at the shelter after traveling long distances with only what they can carry. Many have no money. Some speak Portuguese or indigenous languages, not Spanish. They are fearful, yet hopeful and courageous. Continued on page 4

From the Director

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...”

Each time I say the opening words of the *Prayer of St. Francis*, it reminds of my intent to serve others – especially the most vulnerable in our midst. For me, these words are a beautiful, yet simple statement of who we are called to be in the presence of and service to others.

By virtue of our humanity, we are all vulnerable. And, in practice of humility, we offer an outstretched hand and compassionate heart to those who need our help. Sometimes it’s the simple acts of kindness – like holding the door for someone, being a patient listener to a troubled friend, or checking in on a loved one living alone.



Peace Prayer of St Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

Other times, it’s serving as a caregiver for an ill family member, or running errands for an elderly neighbor. But, what about the people we don’t know? How can we help those who live on the margins, and often have little or no contact with or support from family or friends?

The *Prayer of St. Francis*, for me, is both a gentle reminder and an invitation to make a difference in the lives of others. It is our call to break down barriers, and let the light in – whenever possible. The stories we share in this issue of *Remember Me* feature just a few of the peacemakers in our midst.

Thank you for your continued prayers and financial gifts in support of Dismas Ministry. Together, we provide for the spiritual care of our brothers and sisters behind bars. They rely on us, and we rely on you.

With gratitude and peace,

Ms. Tyler Curtis

Executive Director

They Rely on Us. We Rely on You.



Every day, we receive many letters from prisoners requesting our materials. They may request a bible, prayer book, or any of our study courses. Our mission is to provide these materials to the incarcerated -- free of charge.

In order to continue to fulfill these requests, we rely on the donations of others.

Annually we provide between 25,000 and 30,000 bibles to inmates -- free of charge. This picture represents the letters we receive from prisoner in one day.

We also receive letters of gratitude from prisoners and their loves ones, as well as the chaplains who serve them. These letters remind us why we do this important work.

Please consider supporting Dismas Ministry today. To donate, go to www.dismasministry.org.

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Volunteer Spotlight - Meet Paul



A seminarian at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, Paul has been a Dismas Ministry volunteer since August of 2018. He comes in weekly to package bibles, prayer books, and other materials for chaplains and prisoners. Previously, Paul had been working for another nonprofit organization. Then he met Dismas Ministry founder Ron Zeilinger, and learned about the organization. Paul decided that he wanted to do something different with his ministry. The founder of the SCJs didn’t restrict their members’ apostolate, but wanted them to be open to all the needs of the world. So Paul started volunteering at Dismas Ministry in the fall semester. He feels that it is an easy job – “the hardest part is choosing the right sized box!” – and he likes that packaging is product oriented. More importantly, he finds that this ministry gets him out of his comfort zone, and feels like he is doing something useful.

As part of his ministry, Paul has had the opportunity to read letters from prisoners. In doing so, he can sense the people behind the letters and hear their desperation. They truly need bibles and prayer books as they struggle to turn their lives around. They don’t have anything and can’t afford the materials we provide. So he feels good that he can assist them and be part of something that makes a difference.

Inspired by his volunteer experience, Paul chose to minister directly to the incarcerated during the second semester of the school year. He visited the juvenile jail once a month, and was able to actually see how they used Dismas materials. The most popular resources were the study courses and prayer books – all unique to Dismas Ministry. He discovered that the prisoners using these materials experienced a personal sense of accomplishment and found purpose and meaning to keep them going.

When asked what he would say to someone interested in volunteering with Dismas Ministry, Paul said he would encourage them to get involved because it is a great ministry. He said we need to reach out to the incarcerated because they can’t reach out to us. By volunteering, you can help prisoners experience God’s love, and that can help them let go of the shame and guilt. You can give them hope, help restore their dignity, and remind them they are not forgotten.

If you would like to get involved, please contact Dismas Ministry at 414-486-2383 or email at dismas@dismasministry.org.



A note of gratitude...

To the Dismas Ministry team,

My mom and I would like to thank you and your ministry for bringing my uncle John comfort during his incarceration and bringing him back to Jesus. Unfortunately, he passed away in prison, but your books and completion certificates were among his prized possessions. We are eternally grateful and please keep up the great work!

Blessings and prayers...

A grateful family

(We’ve removed the names to respect their privacy.)